

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

FEBRUARY, 1942

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SIXPENCE

ACTION PLEASE

IT IS NECESSARY that the gravity of the present military position of the Allies should be widely appreciated in Britain. Such realisation may be a direct incentive to corrective action. But corrective action will be the result only if morale is high, that is to say, if there is a clear understanding of the course which must be followed if victory is to be won. At the time of writing there are indications that the morale of the British people is low. Everywhere people are questioning our prospects and finding no answers to their questions. The war crisis in the Far East and the Mediterranean is, however, too remote to impel people to an immediate sense of urgency such as arose in this country after Dunkirk when we were faced with an enemy in control of France and the channel ports. Today, faced with serious reverses in far off theatres of war and political dissatisfaction at home, people are showing signs of falling into a dangerous apathy. This is of course basically a problem of leadership and the final solution must either be evolved by the Government or imposed upon it. Nevertheless propagandists in all branches must take a measure of the blame for the drop in morale. Even granted the initial disadvantage of the propagandists due to the lack of lead given by the War Cabinet there remain within the present limitations a number of signs both of commission and omission.

Our propaganda lacks objective, therefore inevitably it lacks planning and direction. We have seen propaganda and information services swing into action on small and limited fronts and without sufficient forethought. Witness, for instance, the ill-considered approach to the second Libyan campaign. The impression was certainly given to the British people that we were going to smash the Axis forces in Libya, and the continual issue of confident statements was bound to lead to disappointment and depression when the fortunes of war and the unexpectedness of enemy strategy reversed the situation. This disappointment was due to the fact that neither the promised victory nor the actual reverse had been put in perspective with the whole strategy of the war. The trouble is that we have failed to develop an efficient technique by which the truth may be told, by which its many and various aspects may be integrated into a whole and then given direction. The result of this lack is that the public's mind is pulled now this way and now that. On the same day we can read in our papers on the one hand that General Rommel is a thug, a natural fascist, a killer of socialists, a betrayer of his own chiefs and probably the murderer of General von Fritsch; and on the other, in the words of the Prime Minister, that Rommel is "a very daring and skilful opponent and—may I say across the havoc of war—a great general." There is no actual reason to doubt the truth of either of these statements, but it is not particularly helpful to ordinary people to be presented with

such diverse attitudes in regard to one of our most dangerous enemies. Similarly the public is made cynical by reading on one day that the B.B.C., broadcasting in German to Europe, has stated that the R.A.F. is going to strike at Germany in the Spring with a terrible force of huge bombers, while on the next day the Air Ministry brusquely announce "This must not be regarded as an official announcement. It is pure propaganda"—(which is dangerously near to an official denial of any connection between truth and propaganda).

These things are indeed pinpricks; but they are uneasy examples of the failure of the propaganda services. As the war progresses it becomes more and more clear that in propaganda the words, "information" and "morale" are inextricably interwoven. You cannot raise morale unless you give the public information and explanation; and our great failing, which is now being thrown into sharp relief, lies in the fact that most of the information given the public has no forward-looking quality and that consequently our propaganda is a matter of a short-term policy without regard to any long term plan.

What is needed is intelligent anticipation leading to much more advanced planning. Propagandists must not start campaigns in a vacuum. They must take thought for the morrow. Otherwise an unexpected turn of events may throw even the most successful short term campaign into ridicule and make the acceptance of further campaigns far more difficult.

As regards film propaganda there have recently been signs that the need for a forward looking information service is being realised. The film *War in the East*, which was rushed out after Japan's aggression, gave a very clear picture of the situation, and remained undated during its period of circulation. But here again an even wider picture of the Far Eastern situation and of the Axis plans would have been of value. If at that stage, both in film and other media, the people had been given the chance to look beyond Singapore and to make up their minds even to the remoter possibilities, unlikely as they may have appeared at that time (e.g. a Japanese interruption of Allied supply line; to the Middle East and Russia) there is some likelihood that many apathetic people would have received something of a stimulus to action.

The long term plan which is at the moment badly needed could be easily based on a very simple thesis (with compliments to Monsieur Litvinov)—"World War II is indivisible".

The background to all calls to action must essentially be (and will so remain for some time to come) a propaganda drive which will get clearly into everyone's heads the scope and implications of the war as a whole.

NOTES OF THE MONTH

The Fourth Arm

REFERENCE is made elsewhere in this issue to the extraordinary situation which recently arose between the Air Ministry and the B.B.C. A broadcast to Germany by the B.B.C.'s overseas service threatened that in the Spring the R.A.F. would launch a bombing offensive of unprecedented violence. This broadcast was reported in the British press and the Air Ministry was approached by one paper for further details. They were apparently told in reply that there was no connection between the broadcast statement and R.A.F. plans and that it was, in fact, "simply propaganda". This gay abandon with which a Service Department can dismiss an official propaganda statement as having no relation to the facts, perhaps reveals nothing more serious than the traditional Service contempt for propaganda. If, on the other hand, it means that our broadcasts to enemy and enemy occupied countries are composed without reference to military policy, then this can only mean that we have abandoned the propaganda principle with which we began the war—namely that all our statements were to be true. It has always been agreed that Nazi propaganda methods have a great many things to teach us, but it has never been suggested that we should learn from them the art of lying. It is doubly unfortunate that the confusion should have arisen in relation to our most conspicuous military failure of the winter, the failure of our bombing offensive against Germany. Unless the R.A.F. can be absolutely sure that a new and successful policy can be put into operation in the spring, it is a bad mistake to threaten the Germans with heavy raids. It is likely that any tendency to threaten greater aggressions than we can perform will immediately be interpreted on the Continent as a first sign of waning Allied hopes of victory; particularly since our own principal answer to Nazi propaganda has been to draw attention to the difference between promise and achievement. Let us hope that this present issue between B.B.C. and R.A.F. is not symptomatic of any widespread evil, but merely a more than usually irritating example of bureaucratic muddle.

Fitness for Purpose

IT IS INTERESTING to find the propaganda film being used officially as a channel for statements of policy requiring visual exposition. The recent five-minute film *War in the East* provided what was in fact an official statement of the Government's early hopes and fears in relation to the situation in the Far East. More recently a change in policy in relation to the use of the stirrup pump in fighting incendiary bombs has been embodied in the Ministry's film *Fire Guard*. The first announcement of an important change of procedure had to be made, and since the nature of this change and the reason for it could only be made absolutely clear by visual demonstration, it was wise to use the most appropriate medium—the film. It is clear that in making such use of the film medium, consideration must be given to the distribution available so that questions of national coverage and time-lag can be taken into account. It is equally clear, however, that, just as certain messages can best make their first appearance in the press, over the air or in leaflets, there are some instructions which can best be conveyed by film.

Medieval Mediocrity

IN A RECENT issue of the *Daily Express* William Hickey wrote from New York as follows:—

"I think I'll start burning thatched cottages down when I get home. Except in *Target for To-night* and a few other short films, Britain has been mainly presented to Americans—both by Britons and by American tourists—as a quaintly medieval enclave, where there are plenty of cathedrals and no bathrooms.

"Americans adore mechanical efficiency. It would be nice if they could be shown Britain as the great industrial country it is; and if Englishmen weren't always portrayed to them in a mood of slightly pathetic whimsy.

"The newest theatrical importation from London is Lesley Storm's *Heart of a City*. I winced my way through its Broadway previews. Possibly those consciously stiff upper lips, those embarrassing heroics, were typical of the theatricals of whom the play is about: I never struck them among ordinary Londoners in air raids.

"The current juke-box best-selling tune is in the same false and, at the moment, doubly unfortunate vein: "The White Cliffs of Dover." It starts "There'll be blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover." (To me, no ornithologist, this seems an improbable phenomenon: seagulls perhaps, but blue birds?)

"Then I went to the opening of the latest big film, *Captains of the Clouds*, a vigorous and splendidly coloured document of the Royal Canadian Air Force, with a Cagney thriller rather uneasily superimposed. There is one Englishman among these braw Canadian pilots who talks the same old stuff: he wants to be back in England because it is all narrow lanes and high hedges and thatched cottages.

"It is irritating to keep coming on this minor misrepresentation when all our lives are being enacted against a gigantic backcloth of disaster: Singapore—the Normandie—the German Fleet—these are blows which might be called crushing, if Britons and Americans were the sort of people who could be crushed."

Achievement

DOCUMENTARY WORKERS will always have a special affection for the Imperial Institute, because it was the original source from which grew the great non-theatrical distribution field now represented by such a large yearly audience coverage among all classes of the community. Sir Harry Lindsay has now issued, in the Annual Report of the Institute, a number of facts and figures regarding the increased distribution services which have arisen now that the Ministry of Information has channelled all its non-theatrical services through the Institute. The Central Film Library, it is claimed, is probably the largest library of documentary and educational films in the world. In December, 1941, there were in the Library 9,250 copies of 645 films. There were 2,200 copies of 430 films about the Empire and the United Kingdom, 550 copies of 60 films made by the G.P.O. and 6,500 copies of 155 films produced for, or acquired by the Ministry of Information. Of the 5,800 copies of films added to the Library during the year, 5,000 were added by the Ministry of Information, while 670 copies of Empire films were presented to the Library; the balance consisted of copies of G.P.O. films. The Imperial Relations Trust has made another grant of £500, this time for the purchase of films about the Dominions; and a number of Governments and organisations have once again presented copies of films to the library. But the most striking figures in the report relate to the circulation of films:—

"In all, 61,000 copies of films were sent out by the Library. Of this total 29,000 were Empire films, 6,000 were G.P.O. films and 26,000 were Ministry of Information films. Nor do these figures fully represent the distribution achieved by the Library. Films have been lent to about 5,000 organisations. A large number of these organisations show the films to several audiences before returning them. Because of the time thus saved in transit the Library is encouraging this development. Many films and programmes of films are shown to as many as a dozen different audiences before being returned, and it can be fairly estimated that on the average every film despatched represents three showings, each to an audience of between 100 and 150 people.

All this is most encouraging news. It seems likely that the figures will continue to mount, and that when peace comes we shall have in this country the best service of films for civic education in the world.

Special Version of W.V.S. Film

IN THE review of the film W.V.S. in our January issue it was suggested that this film, which was made for American circulation, would also be valuable in this country if commentary changes were made. The Films Division of the M.O.I. have now announced that a special version of W.V.S., with a new commentary, has been prepared, and will be circulated here.

UNITED PROPAGANDA

THE SETTING up of Pacific Councils, the exchanges of information between leaders, the laying down of charters, demonstrates the unity of purpose and interest among the United Nations. It demonstrates a desire to march forward together on common ground. But all these committees and charters are hardly likely to function without a better understanding between the nations concerned.

Our relations with America will not be cemented because of a personal understanding between Roosevelt and Churchill. Russia and Britain will not march forward successfully together because of an understanding between Cripps and Stalin. There must be an understanding between the peoples. We in this country must know, for instance, more of the Chinese way of life; the Americans must have a better understanding of ours. The war is a matter of individual concern to every man in every country fighting Fascism. If we are to fight and work together for a common good, it is essential for the peoples of every land to know and appreciate one another's way of life.

In this country the prejudicial teaching of most of our educational system, the lack of any special responsibility in the newspapers, and the symbols of the caricaturists, leave an extraordinary picture in the average Briton's mind of the peoples who are fighting with us. How can we appreciate the effort China is making for our common good if we conceive the Chinese as men with pigtailed, smoking opium and talking pidgin English—a very popular conception? Can the British really obtain an accurate understanding of the American way of life from their fiction films which flood our cinemas?

The thinking of the average citizen is coloured by the nationalist policies of his ruling class. He is encouraged to believe that, say, one Englishman is worth four Frenchmen. This was one of the earliest forms of encouraging local patriotism. It is right to have pride in one's own country, its associations, its sceneries and its achievements; but it is wrong to encourage these natural emotions to a point at which they become jingoist.

All men know in their hearts that symbols and shibboleths cannot represent the people of foreign lands; but because they lack information about the people of foreign lands they have accepted symbols instead of truths. Incidentally, it is worth noting that many of these symbols imply criticism of the foreigner's way of life.

It is noteworthy that where great ideals have sprung from a nation or are the motivating forces of that nation, common people all the world over have felt the effect of that idealism and perhaps subscribed to it. Witness the overwhelming body of sympathy for Russia in this country at the moment,

when for so long we have been encouraged as a nation to believe that Russia was an evil place because Communism was an evil thing. There is, too, the example of the early working class movement in this country which looked to the Americans, in their early days of the shaping of America, for inspiration in the British fight against class oppression.

We have constantly campaigned for greater dissemination of information within our own country about the conduct of the war, but there is to-day an even greater need for exchange of information among the peoples comprising the United Nations. The Russians are still suspicious of our objectives, while most of us here have little understanding of the ideas coming from Chungking. Yet all the United Nations, in their different ways, are trying to beat Fascism and shape the way to the good life. But in no two countries are the methods the same.

Since the widening of the war, there have been many instances of lack of understanding; this, for example, appears in the out-spoken criticism by Australia of our conduct of the war in the Pacific. There has been China's dissatisfaction at its exclusion from General Wavell's Pacific command. There has been the Dutch dissatisfaction at our tactics in the Far East. There has been the Russian dissatisfaction with the war effort in our factories. There has been our own dissatisfaction with rate of production in the United States. Obviously, quick dissemination of information among the United Nations would go a long way towards removing distrust and suspicion.

The cause of internationalism was largely lost through mutual suspicion and distrust among the peoples represented at the League of Nations. Had there been a better understanding of one another's problems, a greater knowledge of one another's countries, many of the difficulties that wrecked many an international conference need never have arisen. (It is interesting to note here that only since America has become a fully-fledged ally, has any teaching of American history been introduced into our schools.)

There have been signs in this country that our Government is aware of this need. Churchill has spoken of the necessity for setting up little Whitehalls in each of the Allied countries. There have been questions in the House about the possibility of setting up a British film unit in Moscow.

In this country we have observed the efforts made by the Russians to make us understand their country and the part they are playing. For example, the Soviet Embassy publishes at regular intervals a newspaper giving great detail about Russia and the war it is fighting on the Eastern Front. The Russians have set up a film agency

which turns Russian films into English and distributes them. They have made arrangements with commercial concerns to distribute their feature films in the ordinary cinemas. They have sent us delegations to meet our workers and investigate our war factory conditions. In a multitude of ways they are opening up the eyes of this country to the Russian way of life and the Russian war effort.

But this must not be a one-way traffic. We must do the same in Russia itself. We must do the same in America; we must do the same in China, in the Dutch East Indies, and in all the Dominions. But the conception of setting up little Whitehalls will probably only lead to trouble. We have our own experience of Whitehall and its thinking.

What is needed is a complete British information agency in each of the various capitals. It is not sufficient that we send publications, radio talks and films to the Allied countries, we must have organisations on the spot to direct their use. Organisations in Moscow, Washington, Chungking, Sourabaya and each of the Dominion capitals, in touch with affairs on the spot, and able to adapt and edit material and with sufficient experience of the situation on the spot to see that this material is properly used. It is not sufficient that press attachés at the Embassies should undertake this work. They are the preachers of diplomacy and ill-adapted to the dissemination of information. Their previous history has not been conspicuously successful. No, there must be complete units, each designed to present information about its country in films, periodicals and radio.

But this again must not be a one way traffic. Our Allies must arrange that they themselves have similar organisations set up in each of their Allies' capitals. The result should be a complete net-work of informational services which work from one capital to another. The obvious co-ordinating committee in each country would consist of the chiefs of the United Nations information agencies under the chairmanship of the Information Minister in that particular country.

This organisation will take no time at all to set up. It means the appointment in each foreign capital of a representative to see that proper information is disseminated about his own country. If these information agencies were set up there would be a more harmonious working between the Allied countries.

From this would come a common understanding between the peoples of a great part of the world and, in the end, not only a greater efficiency in concluding this war, but also a true basis for any international federation that may arise afterwards.

DOCUMENTARY IN CANADA

By ROGER BARLOW

Mr. Barlow is a member of the Association of Documentary Film Producers (U.S.A.), and recently worked under John Grierson for the National Film Board. In the following article he is not speaking for the Film Board, but has set down opinions and observations gathered from his work on Film Board productions. The article is reprinted (slightly abridged) by courtesy of *Documentary Film News* (New York).

DOCUMENTARY films are being made in Canada—and in a far more organised manner than we have ever seen in the United States. One of the false ideas about Mr. Grierson's organisation is that it now is, and was originally set up as a propaganda unit for the Empire War Effort. Actually there has existed for the past twenty years a production unit under one of the Government departments—the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau. The word "bureau" is properly descriptive because while it did occasionally turn out a picture, its unimaginative leadership was incapable of producing anything that was a credit to the nation as an example of its art. The mushroom growth of the English documentary movement had no effect upon this unit.

Just how Mr. Grierson happened to come to Canada I am not quite sure, but I am sure that he was deeply interested in both the United States and Canada, having previously spent some time in the United States and knowing the filmic potentialities of the North American continent. In any case, through Grierson's prestige and by his efforts the Canadian Government created the National Film Board with Mr. Grierson as Film Commissioner, some short time before the outbreak of World War II. His task was to organise and supervise all production.

Stuart Legg, who had long been associated with Grierson in England, came to Canada as the first new director. At the old Bureau he produced *The Case of Charlie Gordon*, a film about the problems of unemployment facing the youth of Canada. Then after the outbreak of war Legg produced the first of what was to be the most popular and most successful of all Canadian productions—the *Canada Carries On* series, a monthly release presenting in each issue some phase of the Canadian war effort. At present this release is reaching virtually all theatres in Canada through distribution by Columbia Pictures.

To meet this schedule of monthly releases, plus trailers and a growing programme of non-theatrical production, it was necessary to get additional personnel and to utilise all available existing commercial production facilities. Stanley Hawes, J. Davidson and Raymond Spottiswoode came from the English documentary field. Irving Jacoby came up from New York to produce a film, and I came up to work on half a dozen other ones. Some films were let out to the commercial producers in Montreal and Toronto, but under the close supervision of the Film Board.

In the meantime, young Canadians with an itch to work in films were taken on at the old Motion Picture Bureau as apprentices and groomed for active production duties, one of the primary aims of the Film Board being to make, insofar as practical, production truly Canadian. About a year ago something of a crisis arose out of the friction between the enterprising, ambitious new film people and

the members of the original Motion Picture Bureau who wanted to retain the *status quo*, and who resented the new ways of getting films produced.

Eventually, after threatening to resign, Grierson was given authority to go ahead with the film programme that had been in development. The National Film Board was transferred to another department, the Motion Picture Bureau dissolved and its physical properties and staff became the production department of the National Film Board and directly under its control. The producing staff was greatly increased, and by this time some of the first apprentices were ready to go out into the field in production capacities. Of these, Don Fraser is now cameraman for one unit and Jim Beveridge is a director and cutter on non-theatrical productions.

Non-theatrical production has grown tremendously and must now total nearly fifty films a year—mostly Kodachrome and of course 16 mm.—doing a first rate job of showing Canada to the Canadians, and to the rest of the world as well—films about Ukrainian, Icelandic and French minorities, the far-removed districts such as the Peace River farming country, Canadian artists, Canadian crafts, agricultural problems, Indian tribes and cultures, transportation, and many more are either completed or in production. One young amateur, Budge Crawley, and his wife, have now become professional 16 mm. producers and colour specialists having produced some of the best Kodachrome work I have seen. They have complete 16 mm. recording facilities.

Present theatrical production is limited to the *Canada Carries On* release of one two-reeler a month, and an occasional war loan or fire prevention trailer. Stuart Legg is producer and supervising editor of the *Canada Carries On* films, while shooting may be in the hands of three or more units in the field. This series has been quite similar to *The March of Time* in editorial treatment and narration, bearing no similarity whatever to the current British war films that have made such an impression here in the United States. Personally, I should like to see warmth and a greater feeling about people in this theatrical release, but there is no denying that it has been effective in its present form.

Currently two abstract musical shorts in colour are in production in Ottawa. One is a "mail-early" trailer, the other a war loan trailer with Boogie-Woogie music. Willard Van Dyke and I saw the first of these the other day, and I must say that I was quite impressed by the work of the young Scotsman, Norman McLaren, who made them single-handed. He does the animation directly on the film—not Len Lye style, but actual figures and designs. He also draws sound tracks that are amazing, but too difficult to do for a long film.

Apart from actual production in Canada, Mr. Grierson has devoted much effort to persuading

Hollywood to make use of Canadian locales or subject matter, and has succeeded, as will be noted from a check-up of next year's releases.

This extensive programme has come about in two years in a nation less than one-tenth the size of the United States, with no background of film production and with little money to spend unless full value is received. Films in Canada are produced economically and about as efficiently as films can ever be made. It is possible that by its efficient, workmanlike productions the National Film Board will be in a position to go on with its peace-time programme when the war is over. It is to be hoped that the public will realise that the Board can continue to benefit its country.

WAR

First reactions of U.S.A. Documentary to the entrance of the United States into the War.

By Donald Slesinger.

Reprinted from *Film News*

TOM BAIRD of the British Film Centre sat with me in a garden restaurant in the spring of 1939, and we speculated on how the film could be used to raise the human standards, and to make the peoples of the earth understand each other. A few months later, when there was no more peace and Tom was at his post in London, John Grierson stopped off in Santa Monica on his way to Australia. We made the rounds of the Hollywood studios and Grierson begged producer after producer to use his control of the most persuasive of all means of communication to inform, to warn the American public; to tell the world that the democratic way of life was in danger.

By the time the full fury of war burst over London the motion picture in England, in Canada and in Australia was doing its bit. The peoples of the British Empire began to understand each other. And under the roar of anti-aircraft fire something was being done about human standards. The life of the Empire had a richer goal—to beat Hitler in order to be able to promote the public welfare.

War has now come to our country and for a moment we respond with the unity due to danger. But if we are to win the war and later the peace, the present emotional unity must become one of understanding. All the regions, all the peoples of America must get to know one another. Common ideals grow out of friendship.

The motion picture, in aiding friendship and understanding, has its greatest opportunity. It has long amused and diverted us all. It now has a clear responsibility—to use its technical and dramatic skill to help keep alive a love of freedoms of mankind, that will make every farmer, worker, manager, soldier, sailor, a defender to the death of our ideals.

To do that requires a new attitude on the part of an entire industry. There must be no production or distribution bottlenecks. The theatres must be open to essential films, no matter who makes them. There must be a comprehensive and continuous flow of motion pictures to the theatrical and non-theatrical audiences of America. As Tom Baird remarked, human standards must be raised. As John Grierson said, we must inform, and warn the public. The American film makers join the British, Canadian and Australian film groups in dedicating themselves to that task.

NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Fireguard. Production: Shell Film Unit. Producer: Edgar Anstey. Direction: Geoffrey Bell. Photography: Sydney Beadle. M.O.I. Non-T. 25 mins.

Subject. *Fireguard* tells how the ordinary man in the street can organise his own fire parties, and how to deal with the actual incendiary bombs. The film shows first of all how fire-guard parties can best be worked street by street on a rota system. Next, the equipment they need, how it should be used and what to expect of incendiaries; and finally there is a reconstruction of a fire blitz showing how the fire guards go about their job.

Treatment. The main part of the film is purely instructional, with a fair amount of diagram and simple commentary by way of explanation. The end, that is, the reconstructed raid, is nicely covered by sync, post-synch, natural sound and speech. The instructional section is purely and simply shot and constructed, and anybody seeing it should know all about how to deal with incendiaries. It is interesting to see that after all these years we have got right back to the plain jet of water for dealing with firebombs. The film even tackles the subject of explosive incendiaries. The reconstructed raid, in comparison, is a bit on the artificial side though this defect is partly counter-balanced by the fact that the people look ordinary decent folk, and get on happily with the job off their own bat. It is nice that they put their fires out without calling on the Fire Brigade or official assistance, beyond the provision of tin hats and stirrup pumps.

Propaganda and Instructional value. From the instructional point of view this is a very good film particularly in that it makes the job of dealing with incendiaries seem perfectly simple. It is a scandal that it has taken over 2½ years of war before it was made. Sensible instruction of this sort at the proper time might well have saved the centres of dozens of our cities, as it did Moscow. However, it is no doubt in time to be of use to America and should be very helpful, incidentally, in showing them how we go about running our lives.

Seaman Frank Goes Back to Sea. Production: Concanen Films for the National Savings Committee. Producer: Derrick de Marney. Direction and Photography: Eugene Cekalski. Commentary: Terence de Marney and Frank Laskier. 7 minutes.

Subject. Frank Laskier, the most effective broadcaster of World War II, is depicted returning to work in the Merchant Service and makes a personal appeal to all of us to give all we can to National Savings.

Treatment. Laskier's broadcasts (which can now be had in a booklet called "Seaman Frank" which everyone interested in great prose and simple emotions must read) have touched a depth of sincerity which only a film of epic quality like *The Grapes of Wrath* could ever hope to re-create. This particular film is a Five Minuter, shot silent, with one dubbed sequence, a commentary by de Marney, and a final spoken message from Laskier himself. Its pictorial material consists of dock and ships scenes shot apparently in haste but in any case with a sense of dramatic angles. But it adds up to nothing striking as a film. Its sound track, however, carries two important things. Firstly, the com-

mentator's introduction of Laskier, signing on again for another voyage although the U-boats have already taken one of his legs. Secondly, Laskier's own remarks, which, although in some ways they lack the pure spontaneity of his broadcasts, do strike to the heart. On the whole, it is not a wonderful piece of film-making, but its message somehow manages to register—thanks largely to its chief character.

Propaganda value. The Savings Committee have hit on a real down-to-earth as a basis for appeal, and the film ought to be by far the most successful money-getter they have yet put out. They should pursue the same policy on future films. To such future efforts they might well allocate more time and money, since the direct appeal of human effort here hinted at is probably a key approach to even the less-well-furnished pockets.

Land Girl. Production: Rotha Films. Producer: Donald Alexander. Director: John Page. Camera: Graham Thompson. M.O.I. 5 minutes.

Subject. A land girl goes to a farm in Scotland. The increased responsibilities now devolving upon the farmer have made her a necessity; in the instance of this particular farmer—a definitely unwelcome necessity. The farmer and his men doubt her capacity for work. They fear that her towny habits, about which they are already prejudiced by hearsay, will disrupt the even tenor of the farmhouse. But she proves to be strong, sensible, industrious and respectable.

Treatment. Characteristic people and real sentiments have been sought and successfully found. The girl herself is a real person and a delightful one. The conflict of personalities is valid and is validly resolved.

Mention should be made of the ploughing sequence. In this the plough attains an extraordinary vitality. One's hands feel an urgency to take it and join in the job. The parts of this little film are so well proportioned that it appears to run for longer than its five minutes. Besides recognition of the obvious merit of the direction, credit is due to the cameraman for some splendid work.

Propaganda value. It will obviously contribute towards better feeling on the agricultural front. Also it is likely to be of considerable general appeal because of its human values.

A Drop of Milk. Production: Lenfilm Studio, Leningrad. English version: M. Dennington. English voices: Harry Ross, Gerhard Hinze, Freda Brilliant. 7 minutes.

Subject. This is a short Soviet propaganda film designed to emphasise the sufferings of the native populations of occupied countries and their indomitable will to resist. The story is melodramatic and shows sequences of a father's attempt to obtain milk for his sick child after its mother has been executed by a Nazi firing squad. In contrast with the miseries of the peasants in the film we see brutal Nazi officers enjoying good food and accommodation which they have commandeered.

Treatment: Technically the film takes a conventional form not dissimilar from early studio-made M.O.I. five-minuters. Direction, photography, editing and acting all are excellent. The film embodies a much simpler propaganda content than is usual in M.O.I. work. It attempts

to make only one single propaganda point—a contrast between the bestiality of the Nazis and the humanity and fortitude of their enemies.

Propaganda value. This film is probably of much greater propaganda value in Russia than in this country. In Russia, with the war on native soil, the issues are comparatively simple. It is necessary to eject the enemy and in order to eject him it is necessary to hate him. In this country where we can still afford to be—perhaps dangerously—objective, the propaganda approach is reminiscent of the "hate the hun" films of the last war.

More Eggs from Your Hens. M.O.I. for the Ministry of Agriculture. Production: Merton Park Studios. Direction: Terence Bishop. Camera: Jimmy Rogers. Editing: Cath Miller. Non-T.

Subject. This is a simple instructional film in the Ministry of Agriculture's programme on Backyard Poultry. It shows you how to house your half a dozen hens, how to feed them, and what points to look for in a good laying hen.

Treatment. The film is made quite straightforwardly with a few superimposed skeletons to liven it up. The commentary is too hurried and overlaid for the picture, but to outweigh this it is a pleasure to hear a real human voice which is not afraid of making a joke and a good joke at that. The main fault of the film is that it leaves untouched many things that the audience is bound to want to hear about, while, at the same time, going into some detail about more complicated and less important things which it does not properly explain. For instance, the film gives no help on the choice of a breed of hen for laying, although there is a long sequence, not particularly clearly done, about the bone structure, etc., necessary in a good layer.

Propaganda value. The film should prove very interesting to people who keep hens or intend doing so, and also reasonably instructive.

Song of the Clyde. Production: Merton Park Studios for the British Council. Direction and Camera: Jimmy Rogers.

Subject. The Clyde from source to sea.

Treatment. There is no treatment, no approach. The film is merely a cameraman's holiday and Jimmy Rogers has taken full advantage of it. The shooting is impeccable, but the film completely meaningless—a series of excellently shot scenes put together with no purpose. The result is a travelogue with almost no voice—which is a novelty—but it is also a waste of time. The film sees everything and tells absolutely nothing, either by speech or editing, except that the Clyde is a river, which presumably everybody knew.

Propaganda value. It is impossible to imagine that this film could have been intended as propaganda of any kind.

Border Weave. Production: G. E. Turner Productions for the British Council. Director: John Lewis Curthoys. Cameraman: Jack Cardiff.

Subject. The making of tweed cloth.

Treatment. This is the story of how tweed is made. The treatment is simple and there is fortunately no effort to impose a grandiose message on to the subject. From sheep's back to the back of a young woman in Princes Street is a long journey, and we are shown the more interesting stages of it. The subtle blend of colour

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FILM SOCIETY NEWS

THE Devon and Exeter Film Society began its new season in January with a programme which will include shows of Guitry's *Les Neuf Célibataires*, *The Rich Bride*, *Dood Water*, and *Edge of the World*. The first programme, on January 25th, had as feature a revival of *Carnet de Bal*. Members of the Society have also asked for sub-standard showings of film classics and arrangements are in hand for this. It is reported that the most successful film of the autumn season was Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*; to this show incidentally, the Society invited some 60 children from the Deaf School—an enterprise which other Film Society secretaries might take note of and copy, particularly when silent films are being projected.

The Edinburgh Film Guild continues its policy of progressive and carefully planned shows. The Guild believes that a Film Society does not justify its existence merely by providing entertainments on Saturday or Sunday afternoons, and therefore its Committee is anxious to continue such programmes as that given on December 19th, which was entitled "Planning". At this showing six documentaries were shown—all of them analysing various social problems and pleading for a planned approach to their solution. The films included *Children at School*, *Housing Problems*, *Roads Across Britain* and the U.S.A. film *The City*, and the show, it is reported, was attended by a large number of Government

officials representing departments which will be, administratively at least, responsible for post-war planning in Scotland. On January 11th the programme included *Five Faces* (Shaw's film on Malaya), the *March of Time on The Philippines* and Pabst's *Drame de Shanghai*.

Manchester and Salford and the Manchester Film Institute Societies, still acting together, announce a series of shows which will include a number of Soviet films, both short and feature. Amongst these will be *We from Kronstadt*, *Daghestan*, *Incident in a Telegraph Office*, and a revival of *The New Babylon*.

On January 11th Dundee and St. Andrews presented Renoir's *La Marseillaise*, together with three shorts.

The London Co-operative Film Society has now published its programme for January, February and March. This includes Pudovkin's *Deserter*, Shaw's *Future in the Air*, two Technicolor shorts (*The Green Girdle* and *Queen Cotton*) and a number of other documentary and entertainment films.

After a very successful opening the Belfast Film Institute Society began its four shows of the second part of its season on January 17th. The programme was chosen in tribute to Czechoslovakia, which was represented by Janosik, and, in the supporting programme, two Czech shorts,

Prague and Children Dancing. The Pal Birth of a Robot and Rotha's admirable *Cover to Cover* were also shown. *Cover to Cover* has been shown in Belfast before but a revival of it was considered overdue. The February show is to be mainly French, and *Le Roi S'Amuse* has been booked. Two further shows are being actively planned to complete the season of seven shows originally promised. But it is possible that additional shows may be arranged if circumstances permit.

Two religious films were shown at the January meeting of the Glasgow Branch of the Scottish Churches Film Guild. *Lift up Your Hearts* was a short one reel picture with beautiful country scenery. The commentary was good and the picture was thought to be very useful. *Kindled Flame*—a three-reeler—is a splendid picture, suitable for any kind of audience and it will be found an asset in religious teaching. The story deals with the persecution of Christians in the third century and their martyrdom to uphold their Faith. The acting is good and the photography even better.

It is with regret that the committee of the Tyneside Film Society has had to abandon plans for a second session of the 1941-42 season, owing to insufficient support. During the first half of the season *Ernte*, *Le Roi S'Amuse* and *Lenin in October* were shown. The choice of shorts was more difficult, and a policy of revivals was adopted, among the films chosen being *The River*, *And So To Work* and *The Plow that Broke the Plains*; the last, so satisfying in its entirety, unfortunately proved to be a "cut" copy.

ECONOMY

A large number of films are ruined by scratches caused by dirt—or sprocket teeth. To-day a greatly increased national use of films makes the avoidance of waste more important than ever.

Please help by:

- Keeping the gate free from dirt and accumulations of emulsion, and cleaning it before projecting each reel.
- Keeping clean all pulleys over which the film passes.
- Keeping unspooled film off the floor.
- Keeping the film correctly seated on the sprocket wheels of the projector.

PETROLEUM FILMS BUREAU, 15, Hay Hill, Berkeley Square, W.1

SCIENTIFIC FILM SOCIETIES

The London Scientific Film Society is holding its second show of the season at 2.30 p.m., on March 7th, at the Imperial Institute Theatre, South Kensington. The theme of the programme is—Oil! and included in it are Grierson's *Strategy of Oil*, the Anglo-Iranian oil film, and a German newsreel. Full details of reduced membership for the rest of the season may be obtained from the Secretary, Hanover House, 73 High Holborn, W.C.1.

Glasgow Scientific Film Society reports:—"The season so far has been most successful, and although there has been a considerable number of resignations due to members joining one or other of H.M. Forces, or taking up work of national importance outside this area, this loss has been almost offset by the number of new members enrolled. At the present time there are a few vacancies, and members will be enrolled for the remainder of the season at a reduced subscription.

"During the first season of the Society one non-scientific documentary film was included in each programme. This proved so acceptable that during this season this policy has been continued and augmented, as it is felt that in a programme consisting of from 7 to 10 films, up to three non-scientific documentary films can

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NOTES ON VAAGSO

By HARRY WATT

(Director of *Target for Tonight*)

THERE WERE SIX of us in the "Propaganda" party in the Vaagso raid. Harry Rignold and Roy Boulting from the Army Film Unit, Ralph Walling from Reuters, Lt. Mallindine for official stills, Jack Ramsden from Movietone and myself. My title was guest director and I went along as an observer, and to do any filming I wanted with the Army Film Unit. Despite the preponderance of film and stills people we were obstinately referred to as "the Press" and at first treated a little suspiciously. No one expected us to behave quite as ordinary human beings. We came from those twin homes of vulgarity, Fleet Street and Wardour Street, and everyone seemed to be waiting for us to show it. Perhaps because of this "the Press" was housed in the decontamination centre. Perhaps it was just because the ship was overcrowded. We beefed a lot at first but in the end it was quite successful as we had a bunch of junior officers and Norwegians shoved in with us and we used to lie around and argue politics and things far into the night.

By the time we were getting ready to sail on the actual job we were quite accepted. Walling, the Reuter's man, did us all a good turn by doing a real "wet landing" on a rehearsal and carrying on in his soaking uniform. We further improved our position by insisting on going ashore with the first landing parties at Vaagso. There had been some vague idea that we would stay on board the transports and shoot it all with long-focus lenses. We were posted to the Headquarters boat. During boat drill we discovered somewhat uneasily that this carried several hundred pounds of high explosive. We were greatly relieved therefore when we were shifted to another landing boat. This turned out to be chock-a-block with fully primed hand grenades, so we stayed uneasy.

Going across we shot some reconstructed interiors with two small banks of lights rigged up for us by the ship's electrician. Harry Rignold did wonders with them. All the time Harry was the hero of the trip. He was constantly sea-sick yet never complained and turned out consistently steady, good quality stuff. We used two 100 ft. Eyemos. Jack Ramsden had a Sinclair. Both worked well though Ramsden complained that his outfit was too heavy for a one-man job. Rignold swears by Eyemos. I would say two with a Sinclair is the best, but the second man must be able to reload in a changing bag. The quick daylight loading of the Eyemos is terribly useful on a job like this.

It was really too dark to shoot when we began to go ashore in Norway, but we got the German warning Verey lights and the shells exploding on Malloy island. I and the Army Film Unit went to Vaagso town while Ramsden and Mallindine went to Malloy. Our party had agreed not to make a wet landing, to save the cameras. But the smoke screen was so thick that we couldn't see how near we were to the shore. When I got to the bows of my boat I

asked the Navy man in charge if it was deep as I didn't want to spoil my camera. "To hell with you and your camera" was all he said and gave me a push. I leapt wildly and landed up to my knees. Rignold was more unlucky and got wet to the waist.

The first scenes ashore were quite eerie and fantastic. Here and there the bombs burned fiercely in the snow and poured out clouds of choking yellow smoke. Through this odd figures dodged. Rignold as usual kept his head and we got some marvellous set-ups against the flames. By the time the smoke had cleared, headquarters had been set up and we started towards the town. We had shot quite a bit around headquarters; so while Rignold reloaded, Boulting and I did some camera work. Both of us were rather inexperienced. We kept forgetting to change the focus. But Boulting did show marvellous presence of mind in turning the camera two seconds after the ammunition dump had blown up and getting a shot of the debris falling on to us. It wasn't heavy debris, thank goodness.

Up in the town, while the fighting was going on, we dodged about the back of houses and shot what we could. We couldn't give any impression of the opposition as they were all sniping from the houses and I never saw a live German except as a prisoner. But you had to move around quickly as odd bullets were constantly pinging about. There was so much to do and you were so keyed up that there was no real sensation of being frightened. But your reaction afterwards made you realise how much nervous energy had been used up. Actually, to a film man, the whole action became like the big day in a super production. Although the dead and wounded were real, you were so pent-up they didn't worry you. There were the same unexplainable delays, while you waited with camera poised for a house to blow up and everybody shouted "Any minute now". You had an odd feeling in the back of your mind that somebody would suddenly blow a whistle and yell "O.K. lunch, one hour" and the grips would start handing out box-lunches. But, of course, film people are always cynical of spectacular things. Our motto should be "It's done with tiny mirrors".

Some reflections on the results: Cameras on the warships and aircraft involved would have made an amazing difference to the coverage. There was a completely unnecessary delay in getting the film to London. (We were over 30 hours in the train.) The newsreels, who got all the 4,000 ft. shot on the raid, made very good use of it, on the whole. One or two didn't bother to check their facts or the chronological order of shots. But in every newsreel dramatic moments, specially shot for, were thrown away. We tried to make a film. But the newsreels just strung shots together. Of course material shot quickly and haphazardly like this is difficult for the cutter to understand and assemble. The solution might be closer liaison between the service units and the

newsreels after shooting. In any case "dope sheets" must be as detailed as possible. Directors, even if for nine-tenths of the time they are merely camera helps, are of great assistance on such a job. There's far too much for one man to do alone.

And lastly, it's the kind of thing that should have been done from the start of the war. Whatever its deficiencies, the public loved it, therefore it has helped morale everywhere. The authorities said "the Press" behaved well and were even a help. So let's hope we'll get some more chances like Vaagso.

NOTES ON THE FILM

By a Commando who took part in the raid.

THERE IS always a danger in seeing a film, or reading a book, about something or somebody, one knows well—a danger of being too critical, of selecting petty faults and overlooking the real issues. This danger does not exist where the newsreel of the Vaagso raid is concerned.

However critically one views this brief crystallisation in a matter of minutes of an operation which lasted several hours, one cannot escape the authentic note. Here is an exciting operation vividly and accurately presented without touching up and with no feeling of over-dramatisation. Here, to those of us who were privileged to be present, is the real thing. The impression of careful planning, the rising tide of preparation, the silent wait for zero hour, the scramble ashore through the smoke, the bitterness of that brief, tense action ashore, the determined resistance in the spell of street-fighting, and the pall of destruction which finally hung over that once quiet fiord—these things move swiftly and surely in this film. Even those who lived through those swift excitement-packed hours cannot see this film without thrilling again to the sight of the destroyers moving up the fiord or the sound of the bagpipes coming suddenly and unexpectedly over the water. What we do not see—and for obvious reasons—is the cameramen at work. The astonishment of heavily armed commando men who watched the "film men" going about their work, often completely unprotected except for the inevitable tin-hat, was amusing to see. When one is seeking cover from bullets by crouching behind a wall, it is rather disturbing to see a gallant spirit, disembodied from his fellows, moving about restlessly in the open and calmly running his camera despite the battle around him. Disturbing, but very heartening.

Perhaps the more-keen-thinking of the public who view this film will pay tribute to those who filmed—though one suspects that the innate scepticism of the public will cause them to dismiss the whole thing as trick photography or "all done with telescopic lens". But however it is explained away, whatever kind of devilment or scientific witchery is brought to blame, they cannot dismiss the fact that this film *lives*.

The value of accurate documentation in war cannot be over-estimated and the combination of accuracy and a lively sense of theatre is so rare as to be more than noteworthy.

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

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stands for the use of film as a medium of propaganda and instruction in the interests of the people of Great Britain and the Empire and in the interests of common people all over the world.

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LETTER TO INDIA

Alexander Shaw, in an open letter to a friend in India, discusses his experiences in Indian film production

*To Purshottam Tricandras, Esq.,
c/o The High Court,
Bombay.*

MY DEAR PURSHOTTAM,

To write an article about films in India is to write an article about politics. India is now probably the great representative political question, on the correct solution of which much of the future hangs. Enough is being written about India and politics now—here is a letter to you about India and documentary films.

It was you who really wrecked the whole show. After six weeks in India it seemed quite obvious that everybody in your country is slightly mad. Some, but not very many, are pleasantly mad; the others are dangerously crazy. The Europeans are mad because, although they most of them realise the real dangers of the situation, they find it more comfortable to imagine that Victoria, Empress of India, is still on the throne.

Your countrymen are mad because they cannot get what they want—freedom. A word for which we are all fighting across the world, but which has never been allowed in connection with the word India.

The Mutiny, as we call it, is just over everybody's shoulder and the shadow of General Dyer lies darkly across the last twenty years. Neither side ever forgets these two terrible pieces of history; to the stranger they are something out of a book—to everybody living in India they are to-day's headlines. That's how it seemed at first anyway and that, for the moment, is enough about politics.

It was all very difficult for the stranger. Then you came along and, later, were good enough to bring your friends and you showed us what India is really like.

Seen from the ship, across the reasonably exotic skyline of Bombay, the problem seemed clear. To form a film unit of Indians, to train them in the technique of documentary films, to make some films which would show them the way and, above all, to keep clear of politics. Hard work for a year but not perhaps impossible.

Within six weeks of landing the problem appeared completely insoluble. The making of these films, the composition of the unit and even the mere presence of an English film maker in India, had become questions over which film trade magnates and politicians fought with a bitterness worthy of many better causes. The attacks of the Press, the questions in the Assembly, the cunning thrusts of the American film trade could in the end be ignored or parried. And, of course, there was always the ivory tower of Government to retire to. But films can't be made in a vacuum, they can't be made by people cut off from everything except officialdom. The honest film makers must go down into the market place, must be inquisitive, must sense the feel of the people and the life of the land. They must ask the why and the wherefore and they must co-ordinate and turn into celluloid the results of their contacts and questions.

Perhaps it might have been better if we had tried to make our films in a vacuum. There would, at least, have been fewer miseries for everybody, but I think now, as I thought then, that the whole thing would have folded up in a few months, and any films produced would not have been worth looking at. But it would have been much more peaceful.

That's why I said that you wrecked the show. You held the key and you lent it and thus destroyed the peace. I hope that it did not bring too much trouble upon your head, although, of course, you are used to trouble.

The war effort films were comparatively easy. We went to the factories and shot the films and tried to forget what India's war effort could have been if you had come into the war *with* us instead of being brought into it *by* us. We filmed the great Tata Iron and Steel Works in Bengal, pouring out thousands of tons of every sort of steel. We filmed the first armoured car to be produced in India, made out of Indian steel and built by Indian hands, the forerunner of a ceaseless stream of the weapons of mechanised warfare. We filmed the army trucks being assembled on their ever-moving lines, the production figures rising daily as the cameras turned. There's plenty of war production in your country, as you know—bullets and shells and guns, tents and khaki drill and medical supplies. Aeroplanes assembled in India soar above the fertile land of Mysore on their test flights, ships built in India slide down the slips to join their sisters in the Royal Indian Navy. Yes, there's plenty of production in India and the armies of the Middle East have felt its weight behind them. We made six films about it and could have made many more.

Then there were the Services. They were easy too. The Royal Indian Navy, for many years a token fleet, has become a reality. Many of the Indians who join it have never seen the sea, but they take to it as though they had always lived in ships just as their brothers on the coast. Indian and English Naval Officers guard the coast of India together and they have played their important part in the war in Africa. The Indian Army needed no film boosting; their exploits in Eritrea alone have earned the applause of the world. The cinema goers were clamouring for films news of them. G.H.Q. did not take kindly to the idea of cameramen attached to the Forces, and English newsreel cameramen naturally tended to film their own countrymen at war. Australia and South Africa had their own film units in the field and they, too, concentrated on their own battalions. For a time the situation was difficult. The Press was full of the great deeds of the Indian soldier, but the newsreel could only show the other conquerors. But now India has her own film units to see that full justice is done to their part in the war. Ey now you should be seeing them on the screens in the air-conditioned cinemas of Bombay.

There were Indian pilots to take up practice dive-bombing and Indian ground staff to show

that there is an India in dungarees as well as in dhotis.

So all that part of the programme was fairly easy as far as subjects and facilities were concerned (I will speak of the people who made the films in a moment or two), but the really difficult part of the programme was to come. We had decided in Delhi in December, 1940, to make six films on "Modern India".

These films were to have no political slant. They were not to say that everything in the garden was lovely, neither were they to echo 'Mother India'. They were intended to show the world that India was not only a land of temples and stiff shirts, of pukka sahibs and wandering sadhus, but that it was also a land of great modern industries, of science and of some progressive social movements.

These films were intended as a counterblast to the colourful travelogues with their ever-dancing snakes and the equally highly coloured travel books with their tales of princely intrigue and stories of tropical, passionate, nights in Bombay.

We thought that it was important that at a time like this, with the problem of India increasingly in the news, the people who do not follow politics, the people, to whom Amery and Nehru are names in some political tangle and Gandhi a funny old fellow dressed in a sheet, should be shown that India is a great and important country. One day, perhaps sooner than most people expect, they will be called upon to consider your strange vast country, and it is right that they should know something else about it than the twopence-coloured picture usually presented to them.

But now the opposition became difficult and serious. Difficult because our opponents presented a point of view with which we could agree; serious because without its co-operation the films would have been impossible to make. We wanted the help of University students, of progressive teachers, of scientists and writers and artists. Their attitude was that the films were being made for the Government of India, that Congress was opposed to the Government and that, therefore, they could not help in the making of the films in any way. This refusal, of course, was not put as bluntly as I have put it, but that is the gist of it. Their attitude was understandable, but was obviously not going to get any rummy played. One or two people were helpful (and they were not necessarily among the supporters of the British Raj), because they agreed that the value of spreading knowledge about India outweighed the political objections. But it was you who really put us in touch with India—you who helped with all the films, and Premila Rama Rau and Minoo Masani. I hope people haven't put very black marks against you all for helping "the enemy".

Your names used judiciously and with your consent opened nearly all doors. To have a drink with you was one of our few pleasures, to be seen having a drink with you was a passport which led to many places. It was a talisman, not only in Bombay but all over your country, which in spite of its size is in many ways a very small land.

So, with the help of you and a few others, we were finally able to make films about India to-day. We already had material enough to pay tribute to Sir Jamsitjee Tata, one of the world's greatest industrial pioneers. We filmed the great Salt City which is growing up on the shores of the Arabian Sea; we filmed the cotton mills

of Bombay and the paper mills of Calcutta. We went to the engineering workshops and into the civil aviation sheds. The mass production methods of the West provided material at Batanagher, and on the Western Ghats the striding pylons suggested a revolution in power. Using Minoo's brilliant script, we made a film of your great industries.

There were other subjects. The life of the villages going on unchanged through the centuries and the life of the cities where science and industry are building a new India. The performing bear and the marionettes, the ballroom at the Taj Hotel and the crowded cinemas, the Institute of Industrial Science at Bangalore, the Haffkine Institute where Colonel Sokhy fights the diseases and epidemics of the East, the Agricultural Station at Poona where new crops are being experimented with, all provided us with subjects.

There were so many things to film that several years' work on a carefully prepared programme would only begin to cover them. Perhaps these things are as yet only a small part of the life of India compared with the size of your vast country, but the work they do is growing and will benefit all its peoples.

In spite of the many Indian women who have travelled abroad, the West still tends to think of Indian women as veiled creatures moving softly through the shadows, so we made a film of modern Indian women taking their place in the important work of their country. Politicians, social workers, film stars and architects helped us with this film, which shows the women of India in a new light. The women argued the political point stubbornly but helped us in the end. Always excepting she-whogives-no-cup-of-tea; I have not forgotten her early morning attack, the faint breeze off the placid sea and the group of bitter, contemptuous faces.

In Calcutta a unit working under Burmah Shell, made a film of the Grand Trunk Road for us—that fantastic road which runs from the Khyber Pass across a continent to Calcutta, cutting through history, linking the port and the factory, the pilgrim and the shrine.

These are only some of the films we made. You were away from Bombay at the end and we did not see them together, but when you did see them I hope that you did not feel that you had wasted your help.

Finally, there were the people who made the films. The directors and cameramen and cutters and assistants who made up the Indian Film Unit, as well as the people from outside who wrote the scripts and spoke the commentaries. They joined us in ones and twos—suspiciously. They nagged and criticised and felt rather ashamed at first at being attached to this notorious body. The studios, quite unable to make short films themselves and with various evil reasons of their own as well, were non-co-operative; and at first it did nobody's reputation any good to be associated with the Indian Film Unit. But gradually they came along.

They came from all over the place. You will remember some of them. Gian Singh, the Sikh from Delhi. He was the strong and silent man of the Unit, marvellous in a crisis, unmoved by the sudden squalls which occasionally swept across us. Then there was Pratap Parmar; he came from the studio cutting rooms and worked like a fury, determined that the films should be finished. He became the mainstay of the Unit. Ezra Mir, an old hand at the film game, with tales of mighty

deeds in Hollywood in the early days of talkies. There was Mittra from Calcutta via Hitchcock and Carol Reed, the Hamlet of the Unit, and Bodhye from Kholapur who always said that the light was too bad, but who always brought back superb rushes.

In a way they mirrored India. They had their civil wars, they quarrelled, Hindu with Hindu, or Hindu with Mohammedan. But if the Unit was attacked from outside they presented a united front. There was never any communal question in the Unit. And if it wasn't for one or two unscrupulous, power-seeking, politicians there wouldn't be any communal question in India. At least that's how it seemed to me.

To the Unit, as to the Indian filmgoer, a short film was something running about ten reels. Even the trailers ran a quarter of an hour. The Indian film producers had never thought of the film as being used to interpret real life or that ordinary people and their jobs could be a subject for the screen.

They had, it is true, started to make one or two films on the social problems of to-day, but always from a studio point of view, with actors playing on sets which looked as like the real India as English studio country scenes look like rural England. If they went on location they imitated the processions of the Rajahs and took the entire studio with them, and when they came back, excessive make-up and their own idea of how Indian peasants dress plus poor exterior photography made a sorry show. Your film industry is going through a transition stage perhaps. The men of money have got to make way for the men of ideas. But it is going to be a tough fight.

Documentary brought something new to India. It brought not only a new sort of film, but a new way of making films. Everybody in the Unit found these two things difficult at first. If I asked a director to do a sequence of Indian village women at work, he would try and slide off to a studio, hire a few extras, and proudly present me with hundreds of feet of leering, posturing pretty-pretties. Often, when sent away on his own to shoot, he would panic at being cut off from the constant, nagging supervision to which he was used. But it worked.

It worked—with false starts and alarms and excursions but with the wheels eventually turning. Everybody came new to their different jobs. Nobody had written or spoken commentaries before, or worked on a proper script, or mixed three tracks with split-second cues or used other than the most tentative of filters. As you know, not any of the film people had even looked at India before, except through conventional spectacles. Perhaps we started something that will last even after the necessities of war.

And now to finish this long letter, in which there is much that you already know but which may serve as a postscript to an absorbing year. I hope that one day soon we shall meet again, and that when that happens I shall be a real guest in your country and not come as the representative of an unwelcome rule. Although I don't think that your hospitality could be any the more delightful. My best wishes to you and Mrs. Purshottam and all our friends. We have not forgotten the Mahableshwar trip or the cool evenings at the Bar Club. I hope we shall repeat them together one day.

Yours sincerely,

ALEX SHAW

SCIENTIFIC FILM SOCIETIES

(Continued from p. 22)

be included without upsetting the scientific nature of the programme as a whole. Under present conditions, this policy will help to conserve the number of purely scientific films available and the Society can look forward to future seasons more hopefully. In this connection, a series of films on Industrial Scotland will be included in future programmes. The sixth meeting will be held on March 18th, in the Royal Technical College at 7.30 p.m.; the meeting in March being the last ordinary meeting of the Society for the present season.

"Our activities will not cease then, as we have not yet held any of our extra meetings, of which we intend holding three. The first of these will be held at an early date, depending on the completion of the Society's film *Life Saving Bank*. This film, dealing with the blood transfusion service, was scheduled for completion last November, but due to pressure of other film work, our producer, Mr. Frank Marshall, has been unable to devote the time necessary to complete the film. The film work on which he was engaged and which naturally took precedence over our own film, was a film on *Women in Industry*, which he has now com-

pleted. This was made for the Ministry of Labour."

Prestwick Scientific Film Society has now reached the second half of its first season. Certain war-time difficulties have still to be overcome but it is hoped to commence the second season in the autumn. With most of the local halls being used for military purposes the Society are indebted to the Bowling Club for the use of their Clubhouse which, if the heating arrangements are not always ideal, is at least central, acoustically satisfactory and well adapted for projection purposes. A more suitable hall may be obtained on the cessation of hostilities. The membership, at present 50, is increasing at each meeting. The Society has affiliated to the Federation of Ayrshire Scientific Film Societies.

From the subsequent discussions and the appraisal forms the most popular films have been found to be the *Great Green Turtle*, *Cathode Ray Oscillograph*, *Development of the Trout*, *Manufacture of Gas*, *Hydraulics*, *Fasciola*, *Einstein's Theory* and *Air Screw*. The last film is being shown for a second time at the Second Extra Meeting arranged in conjunction with the Ayr Society and the Services. The "feature" of this show is *Skyways over Africa*, a 7-reeler in colour presented by Commander Pigg, one of our members. The wild life scenes are particularly good.

It is perhaps fortunate that three of the members have their own sound projectors and that use of these can be made at the meetings. The national instinct of independence is, however, strong and the Secretary has been instructed to obtain a machine as the property of the Society before the commencement of the second season.

SIGHT and SOUND

Spring Number
Just Out

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4 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1.

5-MINUTE FILMS FOR DEC. '41, JAN. & FEB. '42.

Title	Theme	Director	Production Unit	Released
*THREE IN A SHELL HOLE	A dramatic episode on the Russian front	(E. Mutanov)	Soviet War News Film Agency	Dec. 1
†SAM PEPYS JOINS THE NAVY	Finance and the Navy	F. Searle	G. B. S. S.	" 8
ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS	Watching the skies	G. Gunn	Spectator	" 13
NAVAL OPERATIONS	Naval strategy	G. Tharpe	Shell Film Unit	" 22
WAR IN THE EAST	The Eastern war zone	—	Shell Film Unit	" 29
†SEAMAN LASKIER GOES BACK TO SEA	The Merchant Navy	D. de Marny	Concanen	Jan. 5
RUSH HOUR	Shoppers must travel between 10 and 4	A. Asquith	20th Century Fox	" 12
NEWSPAPER TRAIN	Newspaper distribution in the blitz	L. Lye	Realist	" 19
THE ARMY LAYS THE RAILS	The work of the R.E.s	—	Army Film Unit	" 26
KNIGHTS OF ST. JOHN	The St. John Ambulance Brigade	Jay Lewis	Strand	Feb. 2
ARMS FROM SCRAP	The story of scrap metal	—	Movietonews	" 9
†THE HALF OF A NATION	Women in Russia	—	Soviet War News Film Agency	" 16
LAND GIRL	The Women's Land Army	J. Page	Paul Rotha Productions	" 23

Notes: * Recut and dubbed into English. † Produced by the National Savings Committee. ‡ Newsreel and library compilation.

THE LAND

By RICHARD GRIFFITH

D.N.L. is glad to publish this review of Robert Flaherty's film *The Land*. Reproduced by courtesy of the National Board of Review Magazine of U.S.A.

The Land: Production: The Agricultural Administration of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. **Direction and Narration:** Robert J. Flaherty. **Commentary:** Written by Russell Lord. **Music:** Richard Arnell.

PARE LORENTZ called Robert J. Flaherty "a wandering poet", and it is a simpler and more beautiful description than any of the encomiums the critics have thought up. There is the grace of poetry on everything he has done from *Nanook to Elephant Boy*, and of all the screen's masterpieces these films are freshest and most alive when seen today. He has been a wanderer in time as well as in space, for the societies and customs he has filmed were one and all left over from the world's primeval past. But now the fascinating arc of his camera's voyage of discovery has swung full circle and Flaherty brings us a film of his own country—the United States.

More specifically it is about the land on which that country is built, and which has seemed in the past decade to be falling away beneath us. For *The Land* is that new kind of documentary which other men have built on the Flaherty form, which does not merely lyrically celebrate a way of life but marshals facts about it, raises issues, dramatises arguments pro and con. Like *The River*, the new picture is a sort of government report on the state of the union—but how much more dramatic, how much closer to us, than any written report can ever be!

It is beginning to seem, in fact, that documentary is the new democratic art of our time, a propagandist art, perhaps, but backing up its persuasion by argument and statistics and the consciences of its enthusiastic makers.

It will seem a pity to some that Flaherty, in dropping his old form and adopting the new, should have to begin on material which previous films have made familiar. Lorentz's pioneering *Plow that Broke the Plains*, and his masterpiece, *The River*, have told us before what wind and rain and wasteful greed have done to the soil of our country. *The Grapes of Wrath* has dramatised with heartbreaking power the tragic fate of the thousands of farmers dispossessed by erosion and forced into the serfdom of day labour on the great fruit and vegetable farms of California. A hundred films (it seems) have shown man sacrificed to the juggernaut of the machine. So the movies have made words like erosion, sharecropping, and technological unemployment come to life for us before. Now Flaherty does the same job over again, and he has to treat all three subjects at once, so that the film falls abruptly into three parts, with a brief, unemphatic coda which tries, not very successfully, to show what the government is doing to check erosion, stabilise farm prices, and put the farmer himself back on the land he owns.

In short, the picture lacks that wholeness and gradual building toward a climax which have hitherto contributed to the pleasure of seeing a Flaherty film. This is a fractured film, its skeleton

is awry, the bones stick out through the skin. But I think Flaherty meant it that way. Edith Sitwell in her poems, Stravinsky in his music, deliberately adopted a jagged, staccato form to express the confusion and distress of their vision of the modern world. And Flaherty, travelling through his own country for the first time in many years, forsakes the graceful smoothness of his "primitive" films for a form which suggests the horror of his broken journey. "Here we saw this," he says, and passes on, but not indifferently. If ever there was a personal film, this is it. It is a cry, a groan; it has for me the terrible simplicity of the Book of Common Prayer, or of the Book of Job, which Flaherty quotes in the commentary. "If my land cry against me, or that the furrows likewise thereof complain; Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley." The images are equally as beautiful and near and part of common experience. Flaherty's relentless camera, Helen Van Dongen's editing (her part in the film is a great and important one) make a machine cutting corn into *The Machine*, cutting lives. And we see those lives, cast off, broken

down by the roadside, in the eyes which one starving woman turns into the camera. There is a dulled animal curiosity in those eyes, and some pain because she is squinting against the sun, but hardly anything human any more.

A man who brings his camera to such sights emerges not the same. It is hardly strange that the film is little more than a cry of pain, that Flaherty cannot tell us what to do to help, can only shout at us at the end of the film to do something. To many people the tragic beauty of *The Land* will not be sufficient to compensate for the fact that it provides no blueprint. But I have been thinking for a long time that films should pose the problem and leave it in the lap of the audience, for it is we who must answer for our lives, not our teachers, not our artists. And I say now that this film is important and perhaps great because it means that Flaherty in the fullness of his years has come back into the modern world, to work alongside the rest of us. All his films and his film-making have been a timeless escape from the terrible vision he thrusts at us here. But for him who is joined to all the living, there is hope.

VICTORY IN THE WEST

An article abstracted by a correspondent in the New World from a German brochure on the Nazi film *Victory in the West*.

OUR CORRESPONDENT writes: "The astonishing point is that the German thinking contains so much of the old European preoccupation with aesthetics. That is to say, that in spite of their overt emphasis on activism, the manner of thought underlying the article is still non-activist. For example, note how the writer thinks in terms of counterpoint (an old non-activist conception surely) and the nature of such images as 'Landscape of Sombre Beauty', 'Landscape . . . Ravaged by Guns', 'Darkness, Light . . .', and 'This is Goya'. The images are not functional in progress towards a result but mark time in the atmospheric light of the old order. I confess I am a trifle surprised. For my part I would say—if this article is to be generalised from—that the Nazi mind is not as tough as it pretends to be and there is still room for better barbarians than they. In other words, there is still hope for the more savage English."

"Art?—who cares, we want reality in our war films, hard, naked reality!" That is what the German soldier says. First of all, let us define that vague term, "art". Some of us seem to believe that art is a sort of little white lie, a kind of attractive bluff. And indeed they might well be right about it when they measure art by the mendacious insincerities which use the label. But a true poet is no soft-mouth, a true artist is no rosy-glass painter. He is a realist—more concentrated, less accidental than reality itself. And so is the film man who wants to show a living picture of this war, a picture which shows the true spirit of our age.

"You get no documentary by joining together documentary stills. You get no history by joining together historical events. It is order, the showing up of relations which turns chronology into history. And thus it is the will, the idea behind the film, which turns dead celluloid into a living documentary. To do this the film director must be a poet."

"There is still another point where the war documentary touches upon the basic elements of artistic creativity. Art requires the utmost unreserved devotion—the sort of devotion which was required of the men who made this film—the devotion of the soldier who stakes his life to get things done. Thus life and art become one in the narrow borderland of death. A pictorial chronology of the war was not enough. A documentary must look at the bitter face of reality, without flinching, but only the artistic concentration of the material, the montage of the many hundred thousand metres of exposed film,

could give that supreme reality that was demanded. And he who has seen this finished film will never make the silly statement that art is a lesser truth than reality."

"A poetical report of the war holds more truth than a war diary; a poetically edited film raises its truth from the level of conglomerated accidents to that of an essential truth. It is in this sense that the army documentary has grown into a work of art. It contains as big a slice of reality as a newsreel, and it is bigger than any newsreel because it includes the enemy's point of view so as to give a total view of the whole situation."

"Thus the army documentary combines hard realism with creative editing and sweeping music. There is the infantry theme 'marching, marching' accompanied by close-ups of marching feet, advancing, advancing, crusted with dust, but advancing. And then counterpoint breaks in with another theme, and we dissolve into other feet, marching too, but tired, in torn boots—prisoners' boots. And thus the other themes are built—weariness, dust, battle, landscapes of a sombre beauty, landscapes mown down and ravaged by guns; panzer attacks at night, the darkness lit by burning enemy tanks. This is Goya—the war seen through an artist's eyes—the noble cathedral of Rouen, standing upright over the burning town; or the Maginot line with its criss-cross pattern, ornaments of light and shade, all of it stressed by Windt's score which frees film music from its rôle of subservience. Picture and sound are equal partners, a comradeship of war on the screen."

SHORT FILM BOOKINGS FOR FEBRUARY—MARCH

The following bookings for February and March are selected from a list covering its Members, supplied by the News and Specialised Theatres Association

	Week ending		Week ending		Week ending
Aeronautics		Doing a Dickens' Walk		March of Time No. 7—7th Year. "Sailors with Wings"	
News Theatre, Nottingham	Mar. 2nd	News Theatre, Aberdeen	Mar. 1st	News Theatre, Aberdeen	Feb. 22nd
Artie Shaw and Orchestra		Drawing the Line		News Theatre, Nottingham	23rd
The News Theatre, Birmingham	1st	News Theatre, Aberdeen	Feb. 22nd	March of Time No. 8—7th Year	
At the Stroke of 12		Dutiful but Dumb		Tatler Theatre, Manchester	Mar. 8th
The News Theatre, Birmingham	8th	Tatler Theatre, Chester	Mar. 9th	News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	8th
Baggage Buster		Father of the Family (Secrets of Life)		March of Time No. 9—7th Year	
News Theatre, Birmingham	Feb. 22nd	News Theatre, Nottingham	9th	Waterloo Station News Theatre, S.E.1	Feb. 23rd
News Theatre, Bristol	22nd	Ferdinand the Bull	9th	Victoria Station News Theatre, S.W.1	23rd
Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	22nd	Tatler Theatre, Leeds	9th	Eros Theatre, W.1	23rd
Barging Along		Glorious Vamp (Musical Symphony)		Meet the Stars No. 5	
Tatler Theatre, Manchester	Mar. 1st	News Theatre, Aberdeen	8th	News Theatre, Leeds	Mar. 1st
Beautiful Ball		Golden Eggs		Merseyside	
Waterloo Station News Theatre, S.E.1	Feb. 19th	Tatler Theatre, Chester	Feb. 23rd	News Theatre, Aberdeen	Feb. 22nd
Tatler Theatre, Manchester	22nd	Goofy and Wilbur	23rd	Tatler Theatre, Chester	Mar. 8th
News Theatre, Bristol	22nd	Tatler Theatre, Leeds		Mickey's Trailer	
News Theatre, Leeds	22nd	Going Places No. 84		Waterloo Station News Theatre, S.E.1	Feb. 26th
Tatler Theatre, Chester	Mar. 9th	News Theatre, Nottingham	Mar. 9th	Moby Dick's Home Town	
Beautiful Ontario		Going Places No. 90		Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Mar. 15th
News Theatre, Manchester	1st	News Theatre, Aberdeen	1st	Moth and the Flame	
Beach Party		Happy Faces		Eros, Piccadilly, W.1	26th
Tatler Theatre, Leeds	2nd	Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	8th	More Trifles of Importance	
Broken Toys		Isles of Fate		News Theatre, Leeds	Mar. 15th
Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	15th	News Theatre, Bristol	1st	Mountain Summer	
Canine Sketches		Islands of the West Indies		Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Mar. 8th
Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	1st	News Theatre, Nottingham	2nd	My Ladies' Dress	
News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	8th	Journey in Tunisia		News Theatre, Aberdeen	Feb. 22nd
Cavalcade of San Francisco		Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	1st	Old Blue (Secrets of Life)	
Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	1st	News Theatre, Manchester	15th	News Theatre, Nottingham	23rd
News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	8th	Junior I.Q. Parade		Old New Mexico	
City Bound		News Theatre, Manchester	8th	News Theatre, Birmingham	Mar. 15th
News Theatre, Manchester	15th	King Salmon		Olive's Birthday Present	
Classic Songs and Dances (Russian)		News Theatre, Aberdeen	1st	News Theatre, Leeds	1st
News Theatre, Leeds	Feb. 22nd	Land of Inventions	15th	Tatler Theatre, Manchester	1st
Cock of the Walk		News Theatre, Aberdeen		Olive's Sweepstake Ticket	
Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Mar. 8th	Land of Serviles		Tatler Theatre, Chester	Feb. 23rd
Common Heritage		News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	1st	On Ice	
News Theatre, Aberdeen	Mar. 15th	Lasso Wizards		Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Mar. 1st
Cuban Rhythm		News Theatre, Leeds	8th	Opening Day	
News Theatre, Birmingham	8th	Tatler Theatre, Manchester	8th	Victoria Station News Theatre, S.W.1	26th
News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	15th	News Theatre, Bristol	15th	Peg of Old Drury	
Disney Cartoon		Lions on the Loose		Embassy, Notting Hill Gate	22nd
News Theatre, Aberdeen	Feb. 22nd	Waterloo Station News Theatre, S.E.1	Feb. 26th	Playing with Neptune	
News Theatre, Aberdeen	Mar. 1st	Man Who Changed the World	Mar. 15th	Tatler Theatre, Manchester	Mar. 1st
News Theatre, Aberdeen	8th	News Theatre, Birmingham		Play the Game	
News Theatre, Aberdeen	15th			Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Mar. 8th
				Please Answer	
				News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Feb. 22nd
				Tatler Theatre, Manchester	Mar. 15th
				Popeye Meets Rip Van Winkle	
				Tatler Theatre, Manchester	Mar. 15th
				News Theatre, Leeds	19th
				Pot Pourrie	
				News Theatre, Aberdeen	8th
				Queen Cotton	
				Victoria Station News Theatre, S.W.1	Feb. 26th
				News Theatre, Manchester	Mar. 1st
				Respect the Law	
				News Theatre, Birmingham	1st
				Tatler Theatre, Chester	16th
				Russian Salad	
				Tatler Theatre, Liverpool	Feb. 22nd
				News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Mar. 1st
				Ship Shape	
				News Theatre, Aberdeen	8th
				Sitka and Junenau	
				News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Feb. 22nd
				News Theatre, Leeds	Mar. 8th
				Tatler Theatre, Manchester	8th
				News Theatre, Bristol	15th
				Spanish Journey	
				News Theatre, Aberdeen	15th
				Spotlight on Indo-China	
				News Theatre, Birmingham	Feb. 23rd
				Steel Goes to Sea	
				News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Mar. 1st
				Stranger than Fiction No. 76	
				News Theatre, Aberdeen	Mar. 15th
				Stranger than Fiction No. 84	
				News Theatre, Nottingham	16th
				Stranger than Fiction No. 87	
				News Theatre, Aberdeen	22nd
				Stranger than Fiction No. 90	
				News Theatre, Aberdeen	Mar. 8th
				Sun Fun	
				Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	Feb. 22nd
				News Theatre, Leeds	22nd
				Tatler Theatre, Manchester	Mar. 15th
				Take It or Leave It No. 4	
				Tatler Theatre, Chester	16th
				The Bookworm Turns	
				Tatler Theatre, Chester	2nd
				The Brave Little Tailor	
				Tatler Theatre, Leeds	16th
				The Great Meddler	
				News Theatre, Nottingham	Mar. 2nd
				The Green Girdle	
				Victoria Station News Theatre, S.W.1	26th
				This is Bravery	
				News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Feb. 22nd
				News Theatre, Leeds	Mar. 1st
				Tatler Theatre, Manchester	1st
				News Theatre, Bristol	1st
				Tyneside	
				News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	Mar. 15th
				Wander Trail	
				News Theatre, Nottingham	Feb. 23rd

"Living Movement" . . .

CARLYLE defined Progress in just those two words! In paying due tribute to the aptness of the sage's definition the Kinematograph Weekly translates the spirit into action. Current events are reported for our readers in relation to the general advance, artistic and technical, by which progress in Kinematography is achieved.

Keep abreast of progress in your craft
—read the

Kine^{matograph} WEEKLY

93 LONG ACRE : : LONDON : : W.C.2

FILM OF THE MONTH

How Green was My Valley. Production: Darryl Zanuck. Direction: John Ford.

How Green Was My Valley is an awkward film to review. Most of the film is so good that it is difficult to understand why the rest should be so bad. The bad patches are the two main stories of the film. First—the valley was green, now it is dirty. The grass and trees are dirty, and the people are dirty. The second, the preacher who, although he loves the miner's daughter, won't have anything to do with her because he doesn't want her to live a life of poverty.

Both these themes are so different to the main film that in the long run it is best to ignore them and take the majority of the film for what it is, a human and simple story of how a mining family and community lived fifty years ago.

The first reel or so of the film's 10,600 ft. is straight commentary description of the valley. Then the people who have been silent come alive and start to unfold. At first they are very slow and it is with a lot of creaking and groaning that some of them manage to become real. When you are beginning to think that this is just another film of Hollywood Britain, you suddenly find yourself in the middle of one of the richest human films that you have ever seen.

The family consists of father and four grown-up sons—all miners who work in the same pit—mother, a daughter who has got an eye on the preacher, the youngest son aged about 10, and a daughter-in-law.

How Green Was My Valley is certainly out of the ordinary as far as films are concerned—all the most extraordinary things that happen to people have been made by films into the most ordinary things—and to see ordinary things about ordinary people in an expensive Hollywood production is most extraordinary.

Of course, the most surprising thing about the film is that it was made by an American in America. I should think it is about the most difficult job a director can do, to make a film about another country and another people. It is obviously easy to make the old pot-boilers about Henry VIII or stories like that. But to make a film about a mining village in another country is obviously a pretty tough job. Say a film director is about forty and he is making reasonably good films about life in his own country—think of the amount of background that he has instinctively at his finger tips—in fact forty years of living with the people he is making films about. In England we have seen foreign directors come in by the dozen—some of them who had made first class stuff in their own countries—but not one of them has made a film about Britain of the British which means anything at all.

There is no particular continuity through the film. It is just incident after incident in a family and a village.

How Green Was My Valley is, I should think, the first real film about ordinary people that has come from Hollywood. That is, a film of ordinary people living their ordinary lives. There is no epic trek across a continent—no battle against Fascist cops as in *The Grapes of Wrath*. No romantic boozing in the tropics—no fights over

luscious dames or against bombers as in *The Long Voyage Home*. Nothing that happens in *How Green Was My Valley* is out of the ordinary—and most of the film is of nothing very dramatic, or anyway not dramatic in the accepted film sense. A typical sequence is the one where the four big brothers have their younger brother on the table and are massaging his temporarily paralysed legs. It is Sunday morning and all of them are cheerful—they work away good and hard and the boy lying on the table grunts as they work his legs backwards and forwards. Then his grown-up sister walks through the kitchen and says something to him—he resents being treated as a child in front of his brothers, and says, "You mustn't come in here when I haven't got my clothes on." His sister is on her way out, but quickly turns back as she sees a chance for some fun and says, "Oh! I mustn't, mustn't I?" The brothers stand grinning and she suddenly whips the towel off him and gives him a terrific smack on the bottom. There is nothing much to that, but it is very pleasant when you see it.

The wedding is very good, with the miners holding hands in two long chains and swinging their legs alternately in time to the song they are singing. The wedding party with beer flowing and Donald Crisp doing a most amazing trick in a drunken game. The boy starting school, his fights and beatings, and best of all, Dai Bando, the half blind boxer, giving the schoolmaster a lesson in boxing.

There is a lot of rough stuff in the film. The long shots of the much publicised mining village set are atrocious. The mining cottage interiors are about the size of a football pitch. A lot of the acting is not of the best, but it always seems to be difficult for actors to play ordinary people, and there are always the two fake stories in the background. But the good stuff bears down all the faults and you remember with a great deal of pleasure *How Green Was My Valley* as a rich and human film of ordinary people.

CORRESPONDENCE

DEAR SIR: A word about your review of one of our films *Three in a Shell-hole*. Wouldn't bother you except that it exemplifies a particular sort of drivelling thinking from which DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER should be free.

The film is dubbed. Your reviewer writes: "The voices are affected, the wording pompous and the lip-synching inaccurate." That of course may be true. Or it may not. Different people may hold different opinions. Your reviewer is entitled to hold and write, and you to print, his own. But: "Anyway it is certain that this sort of dubbing on a realistic film is a failure."

"Anyway", "Quite certain", "A failure". What on earth does this mean? I have made inquiries and I cannot find an instance of a single cinema showing of this film that did not grip its audience and evoke applause. The film was in fact astonishingly successful. More than one candid friend has told me how bad, not merely

the dubbing but the idea of dubbing such a film was, of how its merit and essential character was thereby ruined, etc., and, on being asked how the film went over when they saw it, replied off-handedly, as though it were of trivial importance, "the audience seemed to like it."

Yes, the audience liked it. The audience was moved by it. But the audience was wrong. "Anyway, it is quite certain that it was a failure." Your reviewer may not like that 'sort of dubbing'. Nor do I. But what has that got to do with it? His drivelling remark is an example of the dangerous tendency of bright young film-people to elevate their own standards into absolutes and ignore the crucial test for all art-communication, the art-object audience relation, the final criterion which exposes whether our own standards are as impeccable as we may think, or may not after all need re-examination.

Yours faithfully,

Knowle, Bucks Hill,
near Kings Langley, Herts.

SIR: I am sorry you felt that the first letter I sent to you was too long for you to print—sorry because it is difficult to compress into one quarter of the length all of the things about DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER which I think need to be said. However, here's an attempt to do so:

D.N.L. won my respect—and that of many others—because it campaigned for the recognition of the function of the film in total war; because it insisted that the place of the skilled film technician was behind a camera, not a machine gun; because it spoke out for the good of the film industry without fear or favour. But D.N.L. loses my respect when it begins to discriminate unfairly between those who are within a small self-appointed coterie of "leaders of documentary" and those who are not. This discrimination is, I contend, obvious in D.N.L.'s treatment of the three principal sponsors of short films in the British Council, the Directorate of Army Kinematography, and the Ministry of Information Films Division.

D.N.L. has condemned the British Council root and branch. Article after article (unsigned) has insisted that the British Council must go, that it is already on the departure platform. Your reasons? Its policy is out of date and remote from the realities of total war. Yet in your issue of March, 1941 (after 19 months of total war), a Shell Cinemagazine consisting of three items—the ancient craft of glass-blowing, old and new harvesting methods and the work of a village blacksmith—received from D.N.L. a warm review, ending with these words: "The whole reel has a remoteness from the war-strained atmosphere of life to-day and should find favour with any type of audience."

Would the British Council have received equally warm praise for films dealing with those three subjects? And if it is right for Shell to make films with a welcome remoteness from war-strained atmosphere, why is it wrong for the British Council to do so? I think you will agree that a film like Realist's *Out of the Night*, was well worth making. The British Council commissioned it. Then why not devote your energies to persuading them to commission more such worthwhile subjects?

Then the D.A.K. D.N.L. makes no secret of its dislike for the Army outfit—and hints darkly that there ought to be an investigation. What

(Continued on p. 30)

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued)

would such an investigation reveal? That the D.A.K. has commissioned 100 training films, varying in length from one to six reels. That these films have been made to satisfy the immediate training needs of a number of different Army departments—probably rather more than the number of Ministries the M.O.I. finds it difficult to please. That the training given by these pictures is sufficiently valuable that several of our Allies are glad to beg or borrow copies. That the quality is generally as high as—if not higher than—that of similar films made for other sponsors. That in the case of urgent pictures, involving exterior shooting, the D.A.K. is prepared in the event of bad weather—to my mind, quite rightly prepared—to sacrifice photographic quality to the urgency of war. Of course, the D.A.K. isn't perfect. The money available for producers is skimpy, with the result that in many cases the films lack "finish".

Now for M.O.I. D.N.L. beat them up at the outset—and they certainly deserved it. To-day you handle M.O.I. with kid gloves and rush to the rescue when journals with a wider circulation take up the attack. Do M.O.I. deserve this change of heart? Has D.N.L. conducted an investigation of this department yet? If so, there's one point on which I should like information. Units have spent weeks or months working on films for M.O.I. only to find when they were completed that nobody had any clear idea why they were commissioned in the first place.

Can D.N.L. tell us how many M.O.I. films have been stillborn? How much they cost? And who stood in the dock at the inquest? If any films were canned because they fell below the technical standard acceptable to M.O.I.—and presumably the minimum standard would be the worst of the films so far issued—then they heartily deserve their fate. But if they went on the shelf because somebody forgot to find out in the beginning why they were being made and whether they would be wanted when they were finished, then the assumption is that the M.O.I. has not yet completely formulated its own policy. In which case it is surely a little early for D.N.L. to be suggesting that the M.O.I. should take over the activities of any other sponsor.

Yours, etc.,

JAMES CARR

EDITORIAL NOTE: James Carr is in charge of production at Verity Films, a unit which is largely engaged on film work for the Department of Army Kinematography, the British Council, and the Films Division of the M.O.I. We ourselves have little comment to make on Mr. Carr's contentions, although we are interested to note that this is the first time that a defence has been made in writing against the frequent criticisms we have made of the British Council and the D.A.K. Amongst other things Mr. Carr implies that he objects to our editorial articles being unsigned. We can assure him that, in common with the rest of the press, our Board takes full responsibility for opinions expressed in our Editorials and Notes of the Month. The names of the Editorial Board are clearly printed in each issue. We feel that Mr. Carr's revelation of D.N.L.'s tenderness and solicitude towards the Films Division of the M.O.I. will come as something of a surprise both to our readers and also to the Films Division itself.



STRAND FILMS

MAKERS OF DOCUMENTARY

FILMS SINCE 1934



THE STRAND FILM COMPANY LTD.

DONALD TAYLOR - MANAGING DIRECTOR

ALEXANDER SHAW - DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION

5a UPPER ST. MARTIN'S LANE, W.C.2

MERTON PARK STUDIOS, 269 KINGSTON RD, S.W.19

FILM SHOWS IN FACTORIES

Many films are being shown in factories up and down the country. They form an increasingly important contribution influencing the productive effort. This film activity has its special problems, and these are referred to in the following notes which we publish by courtesy of the Ministry of Information

FACTORY audiences offer an opportunity to provide films for a selected industrial audience. It is true that in spite of long hours and sometimes long travelling, factory workers, particularly girls, still manage to visit the public cinema; this, however, is their relaxation and recreation, and a visit to the public cinema does not necessarily do anything to stimulate their belief in the importance of their work.

There is little evidence that people in factories expect entertainment from Ministry of Information films: factory music, radio, and the fact that they can still go to the pictures and music halls probably means that in many districts their entertainment is fairly well looked after. Industrial workers look to the Ministry of Information films for information regarding the progress and the scope of the war, and knowledge about how the war is being conducted. This they do not always get from the entertainments available to them. Workers expect a reporting quality in films—information and news. They do not expect comedy, entertainment or academics.

Factory audiences are interested in any film which increases their knowledge and understanding of the way the war is going: they are particularly impressed with films which show the Services in action, which show how things are done, or which show how the factory product is employed by the Services. This breaks down into two main interests; firstly, factory workers are interested in how other people are going about their jobs in the war. They like to be convinced that other people are working as hard as they do, and they like to see the efficiency of other industries and of the Services; secondly, they share with other people the natural curiosity to know how things work.

While straight commentary is the most satisfactory type of sound track for use in a factory, attention is often increased when dialogue appears in a film. This, however, should not be over-estimated, for while dramatic films and dialogue films are undoubtedly necessary to break up a non-theatrical programme which lasts for an hour and a quarter, there is not the same necessity to have variety of treatment when only 20 or 25 minutes of film are shown. It is still true to say, however, that to an audience of habitual cinema-goers—and most factory workers are—the dramatic treatment has a very important appeal, and a film such as *Four Corners*, which is very solid doctrine, goes over very well in a factory.

Factory shows differ from the ordinary run of shows in several ways:

(a) The audience is almost invariably larger than is secured in the ordinary way. Works canteens holding a thousand people are relatively common. This means that both sound and picture must have wide coverage.

(b) Canteens are almost invariably large and acoustically imperfect; this means that the picture must be technically perfect, and the sound track very clear.

(c) As many shows are given in canteens during meal times, there is always a certain amount of clatter and conversation; there is sometimes extraneous factory noise: during

the early stages of the show there is often considerable movement among the audience.

The maintaining of a sufficiently high technical standard under the sometimes trying conditions found in factories can be guaranteed by taking precautions along three lines: (a) at the production stage; (b) at the programme selection stage, and (c) during projection.

(a) **Production.**—It is not suggested that all films should be made within the limits of factory needs. This would rule out much fine and experimental work.

There are, however, some things that can be done for many non-theatrical films at the production stage which would enable them to be satisfactorily shown to factory audiences. The sound track should be kept simple: it should not be complicated by dialect, overlapping music or elaborate sound effects which tend to obscure the commentary or dialogue. It is more important to achieve clarity than atmosphere.

Where the argument is complicated, recourse to sub-titles should be adopted. "Chapter headings" and short sub-titles summarising a sequence in advance are very helpful. Where a complicated process is depicted, trick titles superimposed on the picture can be helpful.

The voice of the commentator is, of course, very important. The recognition of B.B.C. voices helps audiences quickly to adjust themselves to listening and their attention is heightened. The B.B.C. voice, has become an accepted standard and is intelligible and welcome in all parts of the country.

Dialect, is a serious trouble, even under ideal conditions. Vernacular is not only difficult but often quite unintelligible. Even if the romantic appeal of rusticity has to be sacrificed, it is more desirable to have clarity and intelligibility than atmosphere.

During the period of the "blitz" there was a spate of night pictures—this is understandable but these films are difficult to show except under ideal conditions.

Intricate diagrammatic work and fine lettering does not stand reduction to 16 mm.; bold diagrammatic work is all right. Fine diagrammatic work and fine lettering should be avoided in all non-theatrical films.

(b) **Selection of Programmes.**—The lunch-hour break in factory canteens seldom exceeds 40 minutes. The usual practice is to allow the audience 10 minutes to get to their seats and get started on their meal. The actual film showing usually runs from 20 to 30 minutes. This means that three 1-reelers can be shown or one 1-reeler and a 2-reeler. Often when only 20 minutes are available, it is found best to run two 1-reelers.

The first selection must be made to rule out all films not technically suitable for showing under factory conditions. The 5-minute films which do not have first-class factory appeal should be left out, as these may already have been seen by the audience. The next type of film to avoid in factory shows is the academic discussion. These films, while essential for many kinds of non-theatrical audiences, do not have the urgency and reporting quality which is the key to successful factory shows. This then leaves

the action and dramatic films, the special news-reel issues, the Empire films (for example the Canadian shorts), and the special descriptive non-theatrical films as well as some acquisitions such as *The March of Time*.

Film Officers have found it quite possible to build suitable programmes from this material, but there is a shortage of suitable factory material especially in view of the necessity to visit the same factories regularly. Every effort must be made to achieve a sufficient and growing supply of suitable films.

(c) **Projection.**—Operators will find that technical quality in factory shows can in a measure be safeguarded if they observe the following points:—

- i. The loudspeaker should not be placed on a level with the base of the screen. With a large audience, this practice leads to a marked absorption of high frequencies which impairs the sound reproduction. The loudspeaker unit should be raised to a point at least half-way up the screen. This almost invariably secures a better sound coverage and combats the absorption.
- ii. Projectionists in many cases tend to set the tone control at "cut treble" which, of course, aggravates the above conditions. Unless a hall has extremely bad acoustics, the tone control should be set at "top".

NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

(Continued from p. 21)

with colour, the dyeing—a sodden black mass being lifted from the vat which when dry glows with the soft colour of violets—and the weaving itself. The climax of the tweed being actually worn is extremely well done. The Pipe Band of a Scots regiment swinging along Princes Street during one of its busy hours, the colour of the tartan kilts and then the swift swing of the camera on to a passer-by wearing the tweed whose life history we have followed. Without comment, she is lost in the crowd and the film goes into its final sequence. The Technicolor is excellent, and full use has been made of the rural background of wool as well as of the colours used in the making of a piece of tweed.

Propaganda value. As a salesman for British-made tweed, at a time when vital, currency valuable, exports must be maintained and increased, this film is excellent. (If indeed that is still our policy.) By skilfully mixing images of tweed, its makers, pastoral scenes of clouds and running water, it should make everybody who sees it feel that if they buy British tweed, they are buying much more than a piece of cloth. Any reader of the fashion magazines will appreciate how important this is, when a scent is sold because it recalls the smile of the DuBarry, a bracelet is connected by subtle inference with the treasures of the Incas, and the line of a gown recalls the Second Empire and its glories. After this film, border weave should fill the shops of South America and the other luxury markets with the heather-laden breezes of Scotland and the faint echo of the pipes.

FILM LIBRARIES

Borrowers of films are asked to apply as much in advance as possible, to give alternative booking dates, and to return the films immediately after use. H. A hire charge is made.

F. Free distribution. Sd. Sound. St. Silent.

Association of Scientific Workers, 30 Bedford Row, W.C.1. Scientific Film Committee. *Graded List of Films*. A list of scientific films from many sources, classified and graded for various types of audience. On request, Committee will give advice on programme make-up and choice of films.

Austin Film Library. 24 films of motoring interest, industrial, technical and travel. Available only from the *Educational Films Bureau*, Tring, Herts. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Australian Trade Publicity Film Library. 18 films of Australian life and scenery. Available from the *Empire Film Library*. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F. 3, sound films on 9.5 mm. available from *Pathescope*.

British Commercial Gas Association, Gas Industry House, 1 Grosvenor Place, S.W.1. Films on social subjects, domestic science, manufacture of gas. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & a few St. F.

British Council Film Department, 25 Savile Row, W.1. *Films of Britain*, 1940. Catalogue for overseas use only but provides useful synopses of 100 sound and silent documentary films.

British Film Institute, 4 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1. (a) *National Film Library Loan Section* to stimulate film appreciation by making available copies of film classics. 35 mm., 16mm. Sd. & St. H. (b) *Collection of Educational Films*. The Institute has a small collection of educational films not available from other sources. 35 mm., 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

British Instructional Films, 111 Wardour Street, W.1. Feature films; Pathé Gazettes and Pathetones; a good collection of nature films. A new catalogue is in preparation. 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Canadian Pacific Film Library. 15 films of Canadian life and scenery. Available from the *Empire Film Library*. 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Canadian Government Exhibitions and Publicity. A wide variety of films. Available from the *Empire Film Library*.

Central Council for Health Education. Catalogue of some 250 films, mostly of a specialist health nature, dealing with Diphtheria, Housing, Maternity, Child Welfare, Personal Hygiene, Prevention of Diseases, Physical Fitness, etc. Most films produced by societies affiliated to the Council, or on loan from other 16 mm. distributors (e.g. B.C.G.A.). Six films produced direct for the Council also available, including *Fear and Peter Brown*, *Carry-on Children*, and *Breath of Danger*.

35 mm. and 16 mm. Sd. and St. H. and F.

Central Film Library, Imperial Institute, S.W.7. Has absorbed the *Empire Film Library* and the *G.P.O. Film Library*. Also contains all new M.O.I. non-theatrical films. No general catalogue yet issued. A hand list of M.O.I. films is available. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Coal Utilisation Joint Council, General Buildings, Aldwych, London, W.C.2. Films on production of British coal and miners' welfare. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. F.

Crookes' Laboratories, Gorst Road, Park Royal, N.W.10. *Colloids in Medicine*. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. F.

Dartington Hall Film Unit, Totnes, South Devon. Classroom films on regional and economic geography. 16 mm. St. H.

Dominion of New Zealand Film Library. 415 Strand, W.C.2. 22 films of industry, scenery and sport. Includes several films about the Maoris. 16 mm. St. F.

Educational Films Bureau, Tring, Herts. A selection of all types of film. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Educational General Services, 37 Golden Square, W.1. A wide selection of films, particularly of overseas interest. Some prints for sale. 16 mm. & St. H.

Electrical Development Association, 2 Savoy Hill, Strand, W.C.2. Four films of electrical interest. Further films of direct advertising appeal are available to members of the Association only. 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Empire Film Library. Films primarily of Empire interest, with a useful subject index. Now merged with the *Central Film Library*. 16 mm. and a few 35 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Film Centre, 34 Soho Square, W.1. *Mouvements Vibratoires*. A film on simple harmonic motion. French captions. 35 mm. & 16 mm. St. H.

Ford Film Library, Dagenham, Essex. Some 50 films of travel, engineering, scientific and comedy interest. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Gaumont-British Equipments, Film House, Wardour Street, W.1. Many films on scientific subjects, geography, hygiene, history, language, natural history, sport. Also feature films. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

G.P.O. Film Library. Over 100 films, mostly centred round communications. Now merged with the *Central Film Library*. 35 mm., 16mm. Sd. & St. F.

Kodak, Ltd., Kingsway, W.C.2. (a) *Kodascope Library*. Instructional, documentary, feature, western, comedy. Strong on early American comedies. 16 mm. & 8 mm. St. H. (A separate *List of Educational Films*, extracted from the above, is also published. A number of films have teaching notes.) (b) *Medical Film Library*. Circulation restricted to members of medical profession. Some colour films. Some prints for outright sale. 16 mm. St. H.

March of Time, Dean House, 4 Dean Street, W.1. Selected *March of Time* items, including *Inside Nazi Germany*, *Battle Fleets of Britain*, *Canada at War*. 16 mm. Sd. H.

Mathematical Films. Available from B. G. D. Salt, 5 Carlingford Road, Hampstead, N.W.3. Five mathematical films suitable for senior classes. 16 mm. & 9.5 mm. St. H.

Metropolitan-Vickers Electrical Co., Ltd., Trafford Park, Manchester 17. *Planned Electrification*, a film on the electrification of the winding and surface gear in a coal mine. Available for showing to technical and educational groups. 16 mm. Sd. F.

Pathescope, North Circular Road, Cricklewood, N.W.2. Wide selection of silent films, including cartoons, comedies, drama, documentary, travel, sport. Also good selection of early American and German films. 9.5 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Petroleum Films Bureau, 15 Hay Hill, Berkeley Square, W.1. Some 25 technical and documentary films. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Religious Film Library, Church Walk, Dunsstable, Beds. Films of religious and temperance appeal. Also list of supporting films from other sources. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Scottish Central Film Library, 2 Newton Place, Charing Cross, Glasgow, C.3. A wide selection of teaching films from many sources. Contains some silent Scots films not listed elsewhere. Library available to groups in Scotland only. 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Sound-Film Services, 27 Charles Street, Cardiff. Library of selected films including Massingham's *And So to Work*. *Rome* and *Sahara* have French commentaries. 16 mm. Sd. H.

South African Railways Publicity and Travel Bureau, South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, W.C.2. 10 films of travel and general interest. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & 4 St. versions. F.

Southern Railway, General Manager's Office, Waterloo Station, S.E.1. Seven films (one in colour) including *Building an Electric Coach*, *South African Fruit* (Southampton Docks to Covent Garden), and films on seaside towns. 16 mm. St. F.

Wallace Heaton, Ltd., 127 New Bond Street W.1. Three catalogues. Sound 16 mm., silent 16 mm., silent 9.5 mm. Sound catalogue contains number of American feature films, including *Thunder Over Mexico*, and some shorts. Silent 16 mm. catalogue contains first-class list of early American, German and Russian features and shorts, 9.5 catalogue has number of early German films and wide selection of early American and English slapstick comedies. 16 mm. & 9.5 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Workers' Film Association, Ltd. Transport House, Smith Square, London, S.W.1. Films of democratic and co-operative interest. Notes and suggestions for complete programmes. Some prints for sale. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.